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Lions and Tigers and Bears: I am an animal person. Some of you may already know that. I have owned or sheltered or studied all manner of God's creatures. And I have always been disgusted by cruelty towards animals and the senseless killing of them. So, I am the lead sponsor (along with Raul Grijalva, D-AZ) of the Bear Protection Act. All manner of bears in America have been poached in order to have their gall bladders used for ritual worship in some eastern cultures. The poachers will kill the bear simply for this particular organ, and just leave the rest of it there. The Bear Protection Act would make it a crime to transport certain bear organs across state lines. 33 states already have laws against this practice and this would align federal law and close a loophole through which the poachers continue to slaughter these noble creatures. For you hunters out there, this does not restrict legal hunting in any way. I hope we can get this bill through the House in the next few months. I will keep you posted.

Spending Limit: 43 out of the last 48 years, federal government spending has exceeded federal government revenues. For the fiscally challenged amongst you, that means that we have run a deficit for all but 4 years since 1960. It also means that those deficits have persisted through Republican controlled Congresses, Democratic controlled Congresses, Republican presidents, Democrat presidents and every combination thereof. The longest period of surplus was in the 90s with a Republican controlled Congress and a Democrat president (Clinton). But now, we are headed towards perhaps the largest deficits in American history and red ink as far as the eye can see.

Clearly, we have a systemic, bipartisan overspending problem. We need an external discipline to force Congress to do what we all, including most members of Congress, know is the right thing - balance the budget. So this week, I introduced a constitutional amendment to do just that. What it does is limit the percentage growth in federal spending from year to year to the percentage growth in the economy. That way, we cannot continue to increase spending faster than the ability of economic growth to pay for it. Constitutional amendments should be short. This one is no exception. So, here is the entire text of the amendment:

Total outlays for any fiscal year shall not exceed an amount that would cause total outlays to have increased by a rate that exceeds growth in the United States economy over the period

since 2007, unless two-thirds of the whole number of each House of Congress shall provide by law for a specific increase of outlays above this amount by a roll call vote.

Now you say, constitutional amendments don't happen every day and they require a 2/3rds vote of both Houses plus ratification by 3/4ths of the states, etc. etc. And yes, you are right. But they do happen. There have been 27 of them so far. The last one was ratified in 1992 and it said that we in Congress cannot raise our salaries until an election has intervened. This clearly won't happen this year or next year or even the year after that. It is a long term project. But anything worth having takes time and effort. This is worth having.

Until next week, I remain respectfully,

Congressman John Campbell